

GRANTEE MONITORING

Grantee Name	LifeCare Center of Thief River Falls
Location/Address	204 LaBree Ave. North, Thief River Falls, MN
Date and Location of Site Visit	July 11 th , at the Center in Thief River Falls
Grantee Participants	Shannon Lambert, Executive Director Beverly Melnychk, Client Service Coordinator, Ashley Merrill, Office Manager, Jakki Towse, Client Service Coordinator
MDH Participant(s)	Mary Ottman, Grant Manager
Grant Agreement #/PO #	#109543

PURPOSE:

In accordance with the MDH Policy 238.01 Grantee Monitoring, MDH will conduct at least one monitoring visit per grant period on all state grants of over \$50,000, and at least annual monitoring visits on grants of over \$250,000.

The purpose of the grant monitoring visit is to review and ensure progress against the grants' goals, to address any problems or issues before the end of the grant period and to build rapport between the state agency and the grantees. This visit may cover topics such as statutory compliance; challenges faced by the grantee, modifications made to the grant program, program outcomes, grantee policies and procedures, grantee governance, and training and technical assistance needs.

The findings or information obtained through this monitoring activity will be used:

- To ascertain how MDH program funds are being utilized
- To provide targeted technical assistance needs
- To improve program implementation performance
- To suggest other training needs
- In future funding decisions

OVERVIEW

1. Is the Grantee's non-profit 501(c) 3 status current?

Yes

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2. Does the Grantee have a central file containing the official records for this grant agreement and/or amendment?

Yes

3. Where is this central file located?

Next to the Executive Director's Desk

4. Who is responsible for this central file?

The Executive Director

5. Does the central file include

- The grant proposal? Yes
- The award letter? Yes
- The signed grant agreement and any/all amendments? Yes
- Any/all requests and/or approvals for scope/budget changes? Yes
- The work plan? Yes
- Any/all payment requests (invoices)? Yes
- Any/all signed subcontracts? Not applicable (no subcontracts) Yes
- Any/all Progress Reports? Yes

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

1. Does the organization meet all reporting requirements as outlined in the grant agreement and/or amendment?

Yes

2. Are expenditure reports submitted timely and accurately?

Yes

3. Are progress reports submitted with all required information and in a timely manner?

Yes

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CONTRACTUAL

1. Does the Grantee have written policies or procedures addressing use of contractors and/or subcontractors?
Yes
2. Were any sub-contractors paid from the MDH grant required to sign a contractual agreement outlining services to be rendered, duration of engagement, and pay rate?
No
3. Was the contractual agreement(s) reviewed and approved by MDH before implementation?
Yes

PERSONNEL POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND PRACTICES OF THE GRANTEE

1. Are time distribution records (e.g., time-sheets) maintained to show how employees who are funded through, or contributed in kind to, the MDH grant and who work on multiple projects/programs spend their time?
Yes
2. Do personnel and/or payroll records show dates of hire/termination, immigration status if applicable, actual hours of time worked, leave time, federal and state programs worked on, and earning for all employees who are funded through, or contributed in kind, to the MDH grant?
Yes
3. Does the Grantee have policies and procedures in writing regarding:
 - Payroll? **Yes**
 - Travel? **Yes**
 - Overtime? **Comp time policy - yes**
 - Timesheets? **Yes**
 - Taxes? **Yes**
 - Purchasing? **Yes**
 - Compensated time off? **Yes**
4. Are employees time sheets approved? **Yes**

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By whom (what position)? [The Executive Director](#)

By the Executive Director? [Yes](#)

5. Does the Grantee's payroll preparation and distribution involve more than one employee? [Yes](#)

6. Does an authorized official approve all checks before being signed? [Yes](#)

Additional Comments:

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PROGRAMMATIC QUESTIONS

Please use this space to answer all questions.

Program History

- When was your program started? Why was it started?

The LifeCare Pregnancy Center was incorporated in 1998. In 1995, Sally Nelson wondered how the church could provide support services to local women experiencing crisis pregnancies. She set out to answer this question by investigating other Catholic parishes in the nation who might already have an established program. However, such a parish-based program did not exist.

Through research, Sally found the Total LifeCare Centers, out of St. Paul. She contacted their Director, Will Cossairt, and shared her desire for a local program. Together Will and Sally held a community forum in Thief River Falls. The conclusion: the community was supportive and open to a crisis pregnancy center.

By 1996, Sally formed a Steering Committee. The Steering Committee laid the ground work for a 501 c Non-Profit status, which was granted in 1998. After its legal establishment, the first Board of Directors was formed.

- What need does your program fulfill?

We offer our clients a positive alternative to abortion. We offer them support, guidance, education and resources. Parenting is hard; choosing life for your baby, when your own life is in shambles, is even harder. We provide services and education for the purpose of offering positive alternatives to abortion. Our most common service is our Earn While You Learn Program; our individual parenting classes. Clients involved in this program will receive *points*, or “Baby Bucks”, for weekly attendance. These Baby Bucks can then be exchanged for baby items in our Baby Boutique, such as a crib, diapers, wipes, clothing, etc.

- How has the program grown or changed since its beginning?

Initially, the “Center” was simply a telephone number that Sally answered. After a year, the board began renting a room in the lower level of the Duffy Law Office. The Center was then a mobile phone number that Cathrine DeMars answered and 2-folding chairs. The Center resided in the Duffy Law Office until 2003, when it was moved to where we are today. At this time, the Executive Director and trained counselors were on a small stipend, but mostly volunteering.

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Since then, the LifeCare Pregnancy Center has grown. We are able to offer the Earn While You Learn Program, a program very much favored by the community, and our Baby Boutique, with the support of the Positive Alternatives Grant. We have on staff three client service coordinators and the Executive Director. We also have a full roster of volunteers.

Grantee's Target population

- Who does the organization primarily serve?

The LifeCare Pregnancy Center serves pregnant and parenting women who are experiencing an unplanned or crisis pregnancy.

- What is the program's demographic and geographic coverage?

The program tends to serve single Caucasian women between twenty and twenty-four years old. The Center serves a six-county area of North West Minnesota. (Kittson, Marshall, Pennington, Polk, Red Lake and Roseau.)

- Review recent Demographic reporting.

Leadership and Governance

- Effective Board: How many board members currently serve, who are they?

Six - Pam Paradis, Cathrine DeMars, Pastor Luke Stavos, Shelby Sorveig, Krystal Beito, and Jenny Ramsey.

- How often do they meet? How are they informed of organization's progress and challenges?

They meet every month. They are informed of the organizations' progress and challenges through the Executive Director and the Board Chair.

- How supportive is the Board of the program? **Very Supportive**
- How is the program staffed? Who is responsible for the supervision of grant staff?

The program is staffed with two part-time Client Service Coordinators and one Client Service Coordinator who also doubles as our Office Manager. They are supervised by the Executive Director.

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- How are staff evaluated on their performance? How long have PA staff been employed there?

Staff are evaluated once a year through a job performance evaluation provided by the Executive Director. The Office Manager and one Client Service Coordinator, along with the Executive Director, have all been with the program for less than a year. The other Client Service Coordinator has been with the program for almost three years.

- How are staff background checks done? Background checks are not completed.
- What is your organization's policy on complaints for staff and clients?

All staff sign off on and follow the conflict resolution policy when submitting complaints. We do not have a written policy for handling client complaints.

Budget

- Does the current budget reflect your work plan activities? Yes
- Is the budget accurate for the project size/scope? Yes
- Do you have any challenges with the budget or invoicing? Yes, personally, I struggle with tracking salary expenditures. As an agency, we have struggled since our treasurer passed away; however, we recently started working with someone who may be able to help.
- Has your Financial Reconciliation taken place? No
- If you have an elevated risk designation, and/ or your Financial Reconciliation report cited any concerns, these will be discussed.

Review Work Plan including:

Partners

- If applicable: how are people referred to the program? Are there any barriers encountered with referral sources? What is your most common referral source?

People are referred through friends, family, advertisements, the internet, other service providers, such as WIC, and their doctors. Yes, there are barriers encountered with our referral sources – a lot of the service providers, such as WIC, do not know of our agency and what services we can provide. Our most common referral source is friends/family and former clients.

- Challenges with partners or specific counties?

There are no challenges with specific partners, but we do experience challenges with specific counties, simply because we receive very little traffic from any county except Pennington. We serve six counties but typically only see clients from Pennington County.

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Work Plan

- Review your 2016 – 19 grant application's description of the program you are asking to be funded. On your work plan note the services and activities you said you would provide and the number of clients you would serve.
- **Prepare a short summary of your current program(s) and the number of clients being served.** How does what you describe in the application compare with what you are currently providing? Have any programs and/or activities or services been added or removed? Have the number of clients being served per quarter decreased or increased since June 2016? Is there anything in particular you want to share about your current program to explain its current status?

There are some activities in the program that our center excels at and some we are struggling with.

The activities we perform well on include: administrative activities, parenting education, material support, transportation assistance, and crib distribution. Our numbers are higher each quarter for these activities than we had anticipated, which is good. However, we serve six counties, and only average 50 clients a year. Are there only 50 clients in all those counties who have experienced an unplanned or crisis pregnancy? I doubt it. I bet there are more, and we want to reach them. Once in our doors, our clients praise the service they receive and refer their friends and families. We are sitting well with administrative activities because we are a full staff and work together well as a team. There has been some staff turnover which often leads to temporary turmoil. We are learning to lean on each other's strengths and developing a team mentality.

The activities we struggle with include: outreach, pregnancy testing, case management, CPR & Nutrition Classes, the Car Seat Safety Program, Life Skills and ultra sounds.

We have no real objectives in our work plan for outreach. We are currently covering six counties and serving on average, 50 women a year. I would like to see that amount increase. We have submitted and received additional funds to increase our outreach efforts.

Our numbers for pregnancy testing can sometimes run low during the quarter, and sometimes we are right on our estimated 12 clients per quarter. However, we haven't always entered our pregnancy testing data in to Ekyros correctly, which may be affecting our numbers. With staff turnover, it has been a challenge to teach all staff with consistent data entry techniques, but we are working on that.

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Our case management services need a lot of work. Historically, it looks to the ED like the Center has leaned heavily on parenting education and has backed away from case management services. There appears to be the need for education on what case management services can look like and how we, as staff, can best provide these services. Our current evaluation plan will measure how well we provide case management services so that we can then make a plan to do better.

Our CPR & Nutrition Classes struggle with maintaining attendance. Part of the reason, from what the ED can tell, is that it is only open to our clients, and therefore, has not been widely advertised. Hands-on parenting classes are a wonderful way to learn. The ED is working on a plan to collaborate with other agencies with these classes, hopefully increasing enrollment.

Our numbers have been low in the Car Seat Safety Program as well. This needs a little more looking in to, as it could be simply a problem of data entry. It is notable, however, that the public nursing service also provides car seat safety, car seat checks, and free car seats. The Center may need to explore ways to collaborate with the nursing service in the future, so as not to be providing duplicate services.

Our life skills services seem to be following a similar path to our case management services. The Center focuses heavily on parenting education, with a lack of knowledge and awareness on how life skills education can also help parents make better parenting decisions. The ED will be providing more training on this for staff and the board.

Our ultra sound services have been in a bit of transition since the new staff have come on board. Ultra sounds are not provided often, averaging maybe three a month. The data does not get entered in to Ekyros. The current Medical Director is uncomfortable extending ultra sounds past 14 weeks, and the staff would like to see them offered up to 20. Staff has been hesitant to offer ultra sounds, wondering when to offer them and to who, so the medical team is currently working on a policy for that as well, so that staff can be consistent in offering ultra sounds.

- Do you anticipate making any changes to the 2017-18 Work Plan? If so, in what way and for what reasons?

I do not anticipate making any changes to the 2017-2018 work plan. I am still new, and while I see a few things I would like to change or improve, I believe it is important to first get a better understanding of how the Center operates, what services we provide well, which services we struggle with, and how our data entry may be affecting our numbers. These are my initial observations on how our work plan is being delivered, but I have not even been here a complete year yet, so my observations may be skewed.

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Participants:

- What type of outreach does the organization put into action? What is working well? What are more the challenging aspects to finding or retaining clients?

The Center currently uses a theater ad, their website and their Facebook page. They also had a yellow book pages ad, but that has recently been discontinued. There are a couple of billboards up and they are involved in the Pennington County Fair. The movie theater ad and the Facebook page seem to be working well. However, the majority of our clients come to us because they have heard about us from family or friends. Our Facebook page was recently updated, along with our website, and these updated pages seem to be driving more traffic as well.

Our biggest challenge is drawing in traffic from the five counties the Center serves but is not located in. These counties are unaware of our services. Also, the other nonprofits in our community are unaware of our services. We need to reach out to those agencies for referrals and to the other counties as well. We do fairly well retaining clients, but we do struggle to keep in contact with those who have a hard time financially. They may lose phone and internet service from time to time, and sometimes find it hard to get to the Center.

Data:

- How is program data collected and by whom? Is data collected useful to agency?

Program data is collected by the client service coordinators. They collect it during an intake survey, any client contact, and the exit survey. This data is extremely useful to the agency. In fact, staff will be working with the ED on improving this data collecting system, as it is useful to have accurate data to report to the state, the board, and the community as a whole.

- Anything we can do to help or simplify data collection?

It could be useful to learn from another agency that does data collection well. Also, staff and the ED needs better training in Ekyros. There was not a lot of training involved when staff started at the Center, since the old staff were gone and we were all new. It's been a hands-on learning process, you could say.

Review Evaluation

- Your 2015-16 Evaluation Report Summary will be discussed (If you were a past grantee).
- Your 2016-17 Evaluation Plan will be reviewed. Any suggestions provided in your 2015-16 Report Summary should be included in the plan, if you are continuing a similar evaluation. If you are

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planning a new evaluation, details will be discussed. Do you have any questions on your evaluation? **Not yet.**

Miscellaneous

- Anything else you would like to share? **We are new staff and passionate about what we do. We want to be the best team we can possibly be and serve our clients to the best of our capabilities. Anything you can do to support us, offer guidance, or teach us would be welcome and appreciated!**
- Anything else we haven't asked? **No.**

What can we do to help?

- Trainings and Grantee meetings useful for grantee? Any topic suggestions?
They are very useful. I would love it if you could showcase an agency that does something well at the meetings, and have them teach us how they provide that service or perform those duties, so that we can model in our own agencies and programs.
- Feedback or suggestions for the state? **None at this time.**
- Is there any way MDH can assist you to better equip your success in the Positive Alternatives Grant Program? **None at this time.**

Summary:

LifeCare Center of Thief River Falls (LCC of Thief River) has been a Positive Alternatives (PA) grantee since the beginning of the grant program in 2006. The organization incorporated as a nonprofit in 1998 and has worked since that time with their mission to serve pregnant and parenting women in need who are experience an unplanned or crisis pregnancy. The Center is located in the downtown area of Thief River Falls with a visible storefront and ample room to serve their clients. Their Center is warm and welcoming.

Programs that are currently funded by the PA grant include: outreach, car seat education and distribution, care management services, safe sleep education and crib distribution, life skills education, material support, nutrition services, parenting education, pregnancy testing, transportation support and ultrasound. Work plan and quarterly update discussion led to the discovery that some of the report counts on the quarterly reporting have not been recorded as all services provided in each quarter, especially case management and transportation services. Staff will address these discrepancies and make the corrections in all future reporting.

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Discussions on policies in place for the center demonstrated that LCC of Thief River does not currently have a policy on handling client complaints. It was also suggested that current policy does not require background checks for those staff and/or volunteers that work with clients or with funds. It was recommended that both the staff and board address these current issues and look into drafting policy on both these topics.

Several challenges have surfaced in the first year of the new grant cycle for LCC of Thief River Falls. First, the Executive Director is newly hired this last year after the resignation of the past ED who served the organization for a number of years. Second, the organization's finances had been almost solely handled by the board treasurer who unexpectedly passed away this past year. These two situations occurring simultaneously caused confusion and lack of direction for the organization and staff. Once the staff and board of directors were able to get help with the financial issues, the staff and board were able to reorganize and move forward.

Staff have been able to look forward with their programming and promotion of the organization in the first year of the new grant cycle. The staff is committed to creating a robust outreach program after discovering that little outreach had been done in the last several years. The staff recently hosted a community awareness meeting for local agencies and support service organizations to discuss the PRC of Thief River's programming and what they have to offer as a community partner. The staff felt the meeting was a good initial step in reintroducing the organization to the community.

Currently the grantee uses the following outreach strategies: referrals to community partners such as WIC, theater ads, Facebook page and their website. The grantee is also the recipient of additional funding through the 2018, 2019 PA grant application. Part of the funding will cover more extensive outreach including providing a table for information and exposure at several county fairs. The grantee covers 5 area counties but receives no referrals from 4 of the 5 counties. The staff feel this is a direct result of lack of outreach – the Center is unknown in these 4 counties. The staff hopes to reach out to partnering agencies in these 4 counties.

When discussing budget and invoicing the director suggested that she would like to change to invoicing monthly in the future from the current quarterly invoicing. It is hoped that monthly invoicing will help staff with tracking the grant expenses in a timely manner.

With all the changes that this grantee has experienced this past year, the staff has made great progress in moving their grant programs forward. They have been eager to ask questions and learn their new role in administering the PA grant funds responsibly. PRC of Thief River Falls continues to respond timely to all requests for reports and invoicing with the PA grant program. I look forward to working alongside them in providing crucial care to those clients in the rural

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northern Minnesota area. They continue to meet a unique need and provide vital services in an area with little health equity.

Date: July 25, 2017

Grant Manager: Mary Ottman